



"Agonized calls for help filled the air . . . and shrieks . . . and moans. I heard all that . . . and I didn't care."

The 10:50 Express

By Maurice Level
Illustrated by Harry Townsend

THEY say that you are leaving us today, sir," the cripple said.

"I must. I have to be at Marseilles on Monday morning. I shall go by the 10:50 express tonight from the Gare de Lyon. It's a good train . . . but you ought to know it—you were employed by the E. L. M. before you fell ill, weren't you?"

He shut his eyes, and his face became suddenly very pale as he replied:

"Yes, I know it—too well."

There were tears under his eyelids as after a moment's silence, he added:

"No one knows it as well as I do!"

Thinking he was moved by regret for the work he was no longer able to do, I said:

"It must have been an interesting job. Fine work needing plenty of intelligence."

He shuddered: his paralyzed body strained violently and there was a look of horror in his eyes as he protested:

"Don't say that, sir! Fine work? You mean work of terror and death—of horror and nightmare. Sir, I am nothing to you, but I am going to ask you a favor—don't go by that train. Take any other train you like, but don't go by the 10:50."

"Why?" I queried, smiling. "Are you superstitious?"

"I'm not superstitious—but I was the driver in charge of the express the day of the disaster of 24th July, 1894. I will tell you about it and you will understand. . . ."

WE left the Gare de Lyon at the usual time, and had been running about two hours. The day had been suffocatingly hot. In spite of the speed we were going at, the breeze that came to me on the plat-

form was stifling, the heavy sultry air that goes before a storm.

All at once, as if an electric light had been switched off, everything went out in the sky. Not a star left. The moon gone, and great flashes of lightning cutting the night with a light clear enough to make the darkness that followed black as ink.

I said to my stoker:

"We're in for it! There'll be a mighty downpour."

"Not before time. I couldn't stand this furnace much longer. You'll have to keep your eyes skinned for the signals."

"No fear. I can see right enough."

The thunder was so loud I couldn't hear the hammering of the wheels, nor the exhaust of the engine. The rain still kept off and the storm came nearer. We were running right into it. It seemed as if we were running after it.

You needn't be a coward to feel a bit queer when you find yourself being hurled into a great storm on a monster of steel that rushes on like a madman.

In front of us, quite close, a flash of lightning pierced the ground, and at the same time a terrible thunderclap sounded, then another so violent that I shut my eyes and sank on my knees.

I remained like that for some seconds, all of a heap, stunned, feeling as if I'd had a heavy blow on the back of the neck.

AT last I came to myself. I was still on my knees, my back against the partition of the platform, it seemed as if I had come back from hundreds of miles away. I tried to get up. Impossible. My legs

were doubled under me, useless. I thought I must have broken something in my fall, but I felt no pain of any kind. I tried to help myself up with my hands—my arms were hanging powerless by my sides.

There I was, stupefied, with the extraordinary feeling that my arms and legs didn't belong to me; that I had no command over them . . . that they refused to obey me . . . that they were things with no more life in them than my clothes which the draught was blowing about. Some power I didn't understand prevented my opening my eyes.

We were running full speed. The storm was still raging, but not so violently, farther away. It began to rain. I heard it hissing on the steel, and I felt the warm drops on my face.

SUDDENLY something in me relaxed and I felt all right again, quite well, just a little tired. I remembered where I was, and my work, and that brought me back to realities with a jerk; and not yet understanding what had happened, why I felt as if I were paralyzed, I called to my stoker to help me to get up.

No reply.

The noise is deafening on an engine going at full speed. I shouted louder:

"François! Hullo there, François! Give me a hand."

Still no reply. Then an awful fear gripped me. Fear of what? I didn't know, but the shock of it made me open my eyes and give a yell. It was a yell of terror, and there was every reason for it.

The platform was empty. My stoker had disappeared. In one second I understood exactly what had happened.

The flash of lightning had struck us; it had killed the stoker and he had fallen out somewhere on the line. . . . I was paralyzed. (Concluded on page 86)

YOU MUST GET STRONG

Don't think you can't do it, no matter how weak and watery blood you may be now. Don't let constipation poison your system, dyspepsia upset your digestion, neuritis put your nerves on edge, or any other chronic ailment make your life a burden. You don't have to. You can free yourself from these physical and mental handicaps, develop your body, strengthen your vital organs, and BUILD YOURSELF UP into a strong, vigorous MAN again, if you will only face the facts and take proper steps to remedy them.

The Simple, Safe, Sure Way

There's only one way you can for the weak, sickly man and that is NATURE'S WAY. Nature is the greatest creative power in the world; every reputable medical book will admit it. Give Nature her chance, by living life as it ought to be lived, and she will furnish your ailments, render your blood, get good solid beef on your bones, fill up your natural muscularity, and make you a confident, healthy, happy member of society again.

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off to dreams. She was hearing over and over, in a kind of lullaby, a deep, melodious voice: "Your daughter? You're a man to be envied, sir!"—was seeing a pair of dark bright eyes, smiling into her own with a beam of kinship ineffable.

At supper, next day, while the talk pivoted inevitably round the departed Dobson, she sat immersed in preoccupation so deep as to be conspicuous even in Missy. And immediately after the meal, her tablet in hand, Missy wandered back to the summer-house.

It was simply heavenly out there now. The whole western sky clear to the zenith was laid over with a solid color of opaque saffron-rose; and, almost halfway up and a little to the left, in exactly the right place, of deepest turquoise-blue, rested one mountain of cloud; it was the shape of Fujiyama, the sacred mount of Japan, which was pictured in Aunt Isabel's book of Japanese prints. Missy wished she might see Japan—Mr. Dobson had probably been there—lecturers usually were great travelers. He'd probably been everywhere—led a thrilling sort of life—the sort of life that makes one interesting. Oh, it only she could talk to him—just once! She sighed. Why didn't interesting people like that ever come to Cherryvale to live? Everybody in Cherryvale was so—so commonplace.

"Missy! The dew's falling! You'll catch your death of cold! Come in at once!"

NEXT morning mother's warning about catching cold fulfilled itself. Missy awoke with a head that felt as big as a washtub, painfully laborious breath, and a wild impulse to sneeze every other minute. Mother, who was an ardent advocate of "taking things in time," ordered a holiday from school and a foot-bath of hot mustard water. "This all comes from your mooning out there in the summer-house so late," she chided as she made a final test of the water for her daughter's feet.

She started to leave the room.

"Oh, mother!"

"Well?" Rather impatiently Mrs. Merriam turned in the doorway.

"Would you mind handing me my tablet and pencil?"

"What! There in the bath?"

"I just thought"—Missy paused to sneeze—"maybe I might get an inspiration, and couldn't get out to write it down."

"You're an absurd child." But she brought the tablet and pencil and lingered a little to pull the shawl round Missy's shoulders a little closer.

Presently, with a dreamy, abstracted smile, Missy opened the tablet, poised the pencil, and began to write. But she was scarcely conscious of any of this, of directing her pencil even; it was almost as if the pencil guided itself. And it wrote.

THERE was the sound of tiptoeing at the door, of whispering; but the author

took no notice. Then someone entered, bearing hot water; but the author gave no sign. Someone poured hot water into the foot-tub; the author wriggled her feet.

"Too hot, dear?" said mother's voice. The author shook her head abstractedly. Words were singing in her ears to drown all else. They flowed through her whole being, down her arms, out through her hand and pencil, wrote themselves immortally. The pencil traced.

"And sad, indeed, is that life which sails on its own way, wrapped in its own gloom, giving out no signal and heeding none, hailing not its fellow and heeding no hail. For the gloom will grow greater and greater; there will be no sympathy to tide it over the rocks."

"So let these ships, which have such a vast, such an unutterable influence, use that influence for brightening the encompassing gloom. Let them not be wrapped in their own selfishness or sorrow, but let their voice be filled with hope and love. For, by so doing, the waters of Life will grow smoother, and the signals will never flicker."

The inspired instrument lapsed from nerveless fingers; the author relaxed in her chair and sighed a deep sigh. All of a sudden she felt tired, tired; but it was a blessed weariness that comes after a divine frenzy has had its way with you.

Almost at once mother was there, rubbing her feet with towels, hustling her into bed.

"Now, you must keep covered up awhile," she said.

Missy was too happily listless to object. But, from under the hot blankets, she murmured:

"You can read the Valedictory if you want to. It's all done."

COMMENCEMENT night arrived.

Twenty-odd young, pulsing entities were lifting and lifting to a brand-new, individual experience, each one of them, doubtless, as firmly convinced as the class Valedictorian that he—or she—was the unique center round which buzzed this rushing, bewitching, upsetting occasion.

Yet everyone had to admit that the Valedictorian made a tremendous impression: a slender girl in white standing alone on a lighted stage—only one person in all that assemblage was conscious that it was the identical spot where once stood the renowned Dobson—gazing with luminous eyes out from the darkened auditorium. It was crowded out there but intensely quiet, for all the people were listening to the girl up there illumined: the lift and fall of her voice, the sentiments fine, noble, and inspiring. They followed the slow grace of her arms and hands—it was, indeed, as if she held them in the hollow of her hand.

She told all about the darkness our souls sail through under their sealed orders, knowing neither course nor port—and it was easy

for Cherryvale in the hushed and darkened auditorium to feel with her. . . .

"So let these ships, which have such a vast, such an unutterable influence, use that influence for brightening the encompassing gloom. . . . For, by so doing, the waters of Life will grow smoother, and the signals will never flicker."

She came to the last undulating cadence, the last vibrantly sustained phrase; and then, as she paused and bowed, there was a moment of hush—and then the applause began. Oh, what applause! And then, slowly, graciously, modest, but with a certain queenly pride, the shining figure in white turned and left the stage.

Here was a noble triumph, remembered for years even by teachers. Down in the audience father and mother and grandpa and grandma and all the other relatives who, with suspiciously wet eyes, were assembled in the "reserved section," overheard such murmurs as: "And she's only seventeen! Where do young folks get those ideas?"—and "What an unusual gift of phraseology!" Missy had time for only hurried congratulations from her family. For she must rush off to the annual Alumni banquet. She was going with Raymond Bonner, who now was hovering about her more zealously than ever. She would have preferred to share this triumphant hour with—with, well, with someone older and more experienced and better able to understand. But she liked Raymond; once, long ago—a whole year ago—she'd had absurd dreams about him. Yet he was a nice boy; the nicest and most sought-after boy in the class. She was not unhappy at going off with him.

FATHER and mother walked home alone, communing together in that pride-tinged-with-sadness that must, at times, come to all parents.

Mother said: "And to think I was so worried! That hat-making, and then that special spell of idle mooning over something-or-nothing, nearly drove me frantic!"

Father smiled through the darkness. "I suppose, after all," mother mused on, surreptitiously wiping those prideful eyes, "that there is something in inspiration, and the dear child just had to wait till she got it, and that she doesn't know any more than we do where it came from."

"No, I dare say she doesn't." But sometimes father was more like a friend than a parent, and that faint, unnoted stress was the only sign he ever gave of what he knew about this inspiration.

THE young man who applies business efficiency to courtship will learn some things about love. See "The Obvious Thing," the first of Rex Beek's humorous stories—in Hearst's for July.

The 10:50 Express

(Concluded from page 33)

breathed again. The fire would go out for want of fuel. The engine would stop. The guard would hurry around to the front of the train. I would tell him what had happened. He would put fog-signals in front of and behind us. We should be saved! . . .

But my relief did not last long. We had just dashed through a station when I saw something that made my hair stand on end; the signal was against us! The block I was entering wasn't free.

I DON'T know why I didn't go mad. I imagine what can go through a man's mind when, tearing along on an engine going at seventy miles an hour, he is warned that an obstacle bars the road.

I said to myself: "If you don't stop, you, and with you the whole train, will be smashed to pieces. To stop this awful thing, you need only make a slight movement, the simple movement of taking hold of that lever two feet away from you. But you won't make the movement—you can't make it—and you will see the whole thing happen, will have the agony, a hundred times worse than death itself, of sighting the thing on which you will smash, of watching it grow larger, of rushing onto it."

I tried to shut my eyes. I couldn't. In spite of myself I kept watching, watching—and I saw it all, sir, I saw it all! I guessed what the obstacle was before it appeared, and soon there was no doubt about it. It

was a train that had broken down that was blocking our way. I could see its shadow, its rear-lights. It came nearer. . . . It came nearer! Why did I shriek: "Help! Stop!" Who could hear? It came nearer. All of me was dead except my head. And that was alive with the terrible life of eyes that could see everything even in the blackness of the night, of ears that could hear everything even through the roaring of the wheels, of a frantic will that kept giving me orders like those an officer gives to routed soldiers he is trying to rally.

It came nearer. Only five hundred yards away . . . only three hundred . . . shadowy forms ran about the line . . . only one hundred . . . one hundred yards . . . just a flash! . . . It was the end—the crash—the churning heap. Annihilation!

I came to myself under a pile of wreckage. Agonized calls for help filled the air. I could see people running through the fields carrying lanterns, and others with the injured in their arms—and hear shrieks—and weeping. . . .

I saw, I heard all that, and didn't care. I was no longer thinking. I didn't call. . . .

Between two beams that crossed over my head, so close that my lips touched them, I could see a little bit of sky, very pure; I just lay looking at a tiny star that trembled there, bright, pretty. It amazed me.

YOU'LL read Maurice Level's powerful story "The Kennel" straight through to the end with every muscle tense. In Hearst's for July.